

Handicapped finally able to enjoy beach

By Mark D. Jones

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DUXBURY — Not even a delay caused by a weakened Hurricane Bertha could put a damper on the ribbon-cutting ceremony that officially opened the new access ramps at Duxbury Beach.

Close to 100 people showed up Sunday afternoon to honor the completion of the 18-month project.

"People who are here today are a tribute to our community," Rep. Fran Marini, R-Hanson, told the crowd.

The ramps were installed to improve access to the beach, especially for those who are handicapped. The larger of the two, off the parking lot near Powder Point Bridge, contains a pier-like structure built to withstand ocean waves and a removable ramp going down to the beach. A second, shorter ramp, was built at the back of the Blakeman's building.

Selectmen Margaret Kearney said she believes the new ramps will benefit many more beachgoers than just the handicapped.

"We feel it will benefit the entire population," she said. "Elderly who have trouble with the sand, parents with children, and most important the wheelchair-bound people who could not get to the beach."

The reaction of the disabled

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Staff photo/Ed Dutra

On the beach — Bernadette Niedermann gets a chance to enjoy the beach with the help of the town's new oversand wheelchair and lifeguard Chris McBride.

community appeared to demonstrate just how much the new ramps mean to them. In one of the more powerful moments of the ceremony, Dave Hall of the Mass Office on Disabilities addressed the crowd.

"Thank you Duxbury," said Hall, who moves his wheelchair by use of a tube that he blows into and described himself as a civil activist and soon to be lawyer. "This is a first and can be used as an example of what can be done if people work together."

Patty Cristoforo, chairman of the Duxbury Commission on Disabilities, said she believes that life is delicate and communities should look toward the future. "This ramp will benefit everyone. You never know what the future brings for you and your family," she said.

Cristoforo went on to say that working on the project was an honor and brought its own rewards for her and fellow commission members. "It was a group effort of a team of interesting people who bring so many interesting experiences," she said.

But the project did have its share of difficulties. Kearney suggested that one of the main reasons the ramp construction took so long was the time-consuming process of collecting the necessary permits for the project to break ground.

"It took us time because there are environmental issues regarding the dunes and vegetation," she said. "We also had to meet all specifications of the Americans with Disabilities Act."

The legislation, enacted in 1990, requires all public facilities to be accessible to handicapped people.

Town meeting had approved \$75,000 for the commission on disabilities to use in its efforts to bring the town into compliance with the disabilities act. The commission spent \$25,000 of that money for a study on all public facilities in town to evaluate their handicapped accessibility.

The remainder of the funding went toward construction of the ramps.

The total cost of the project was \$60,000, partially funded by Duxbury Beach Reservation Inc., which owns the beach and leases it to the town for \$100,000 a year.

The contractor the town hired to build the ramps was J. Biotti Inc. According to the harbor-master's office, the construction went smoothly.

Following Sunday's ceremony, in an effort to symbolize what the ramps represent, a group of people, some physically challenged, made their way up the ramp to enjoy the sun-covered beach.

"It was a very satisfying experience," said John Nash, a trustee of the beach reservation. "I got a real education in dealing with the problems faced by the physically challenged. It made me a real believer in the cause."